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## FAIRY TEACHINGS.

BY MISS HARRIETTE FANNING READ.

Oh, the merry days of childhood,  
When my home was fairy land:  
When I roamed the fragrant wildwood,  
Sporting with an elfin band.

Many marvels there they showed me;  
Many wondrous truths they told,  
When to Nature's love they vowed me.  
'Neath the grey rocks, stern and old.

When I sought the brooklet's kisses,  
There my slender limbs to lave,  
Elves, that whispered thousand blisses,  
Sported on each tiny wave.

Thus they murmured—"As thou toilest  
Thro' the world's bewild'ring maze,  
And its bright, delusive visions  
Throng upon thy aching gaze—

"Call us then, oh earnest lover,  
With thy childhood's voice of truth;  
O'er thy path again we hover,  
Mindful of thy trusting youth—

"And again Hope's saffron morning  
Dawns beneath our wings of light,  
Toil, and strife, and care adorning—  
Banishing Despair's false night."

Thus they whispered in life's morning,  
With each riplet's soft caress;  
Teaching, 'mid a vain world's scorning,  
Nature's pow'r to soothe and bless.

Gently, then, the wood-sprites led me  
To a dark, sequestered glade;  
There a fragrant couch they spread me,  
'Neath the greenwood's regal shade.

Fairy music floated round me,  
From each leaf and flow'et rare;  
Songs the elfin people sang me,  
Of the wise, and true, and fair.

Visions, too, of ancient glories,  
Wrought they with their glorious art;  
Painting old, heroic stories,  
To exalt my loving heart.

Demigods of Hellas, wrought they;  
Saints, in Christ, who sank to sleep:  
Freedom's seers and martyrs brought they;  
Women, doomed to watch and weep—

Godlike faith and lofty honor,  
Joy sublime in parting breath,  
Martyrdom to earth's dishonor,  
Love whose life was unto death.

Thus they taught my radiant childhood,  
With sweet songs and visions rife—  
Wo, that e'er the fragrant wildwood,  
I should lose for earthly strife!

Wo, yet to my wild heart's longings,  
Still respond that elfin band—  
Ever true and tender, thronging  
With their lays of fairy land.

With their lays, their visions glowing,  
Error's phantoms fade from view;  
So Life's stream is ever flowing  
With the beautiful and true.

THE hearing ear is always found close to the speaking tongue; and no genius can long or often utter anything which is not invited and gladly entertained by men around him.—*Emerson*.

## LESSING.

WE do not apologize to our readers for introducing another man of letters into our literary temple devoted to the Fine Arts. The more the influence of Literature upon Art is understood, the better will it be both for poets and artists. Lessing in his "Laocoön,"—the same "Laocoön" from which Ruskin quotes so copiously—alludes to the saying of Simonides, that "Painting is silent poetry, and poetry a living picture," but, at the same time, he demolishes the brilliant commonplace of the versatile Greek, who, like Voltaire in his days, and Macaulay in ours, loved a dazzling antithesis much better than he loved truth. There are minds to whom a landscape of Turner appeals more eloquently than the most finished stanza of Wordsworth; there are other minds more forcibly carried away by one of the poems of Longfellow, than by the most inspiring picture of Michael Angelo, and, we venture to say, that the most subtle definition of the comparative characteristic of Painters and Poets, from Simonides up to the present day, will all, more or less, clash with the practical experience of humanity. But of one thing we are certain. The Painter draws inspiration from the Poet; the Poet draws inspiration from the Painter; and the man who would gather from the Past and the Present, the influence which Literature exercises upon Art, and Art upon Literature, and scientifically establish the spiritual laws and affinities upon which the mighty soul-fellowship is based, he would prove a great, if not a greater benefactor to his race, than whole battalions of political economists and compilers of statistics. Let us all pray that the time will draw nearer and nearer for some spiritual Adam Smith, or Ruskin-like Ricardo, to deliver us from our chattle worship, and to bring us nearer and nearer to the love of the Infinite and the Beautiful. In the meanwhile, as far as it may be within our limited power, we will do our best; and, without stopping to inquire, whether the Pen, or the Pencil, or the Chisel was the instrument used to overcome the ignoble, and to develop the nobler instincts of Humanity. We are anxious to call the attention of the American mind to all the noble works of all those who have achieved such noble deeds.

Nor should the prominent part which Germany holds, in a paper like ours, be wondered at. Germany is the land of idealists, the land of vigorous thought, the land where we all have to go occasionally to regenerate our faith in first principles and absolute truths. But we have still another motive for devoting some space to Lessing, beside all this, and besides the fact, that, with the exception of a few of our ripest scholars and theologians, much less is known in this country about Lessing, than about other much less influential German writers.

Our principal motive in speaking of Lessing is in the fact of our having, in our last number, spoken of Schiller, and incidentally of Goethe. To speak of Schiller and Goethe, and not to speak of Lessing, would be as ungraceful as for some future writer to speak of some future Michael Angelo and Titian, and not to speak of Ruskin.

Lessing was of the Ruskin stamp of mind. *Immensely suggestive*. But as the lovely and accomplished mother is never

spoken of, who sows in the mind of her child the seeds of his future greatness, even so are the spiritual seed-sowers soon forgotten, to whose critical labor the world of artists and poets is indebted for the separation of the tares from the wheat, and for the opening of fresh fields and avenues for their genius. The Ruskins and Lessings are the pioneers of Art and Literature.

But the labor of our own backwoodsmen in Kentucky, compared to the labor of Ruskin in the Anglo-Saxon land, and of Lessing in the Rhine and Elbe land, is mere child's play. They stood only in danger of a neat little Indian arrow, but they stood upon a virgin soil. But look at Ruskin, with the clumsy, savage, myriad arrows of ignorance darted against his ideal aspirations, and standing upon a soil polluted by prejudice, and vitiated by time-brassened stolidity.

Lessing's position was not much more enviable. Like our own Emerson and Everett, he began life with Theology, but his genius, or his "uncommon common sense," to adopt Theodore Parker's nice definition of genius, soon rebelled against the narrow limits of monastical and ecclesiastical systems, and he went to Berlin, to support himself by literary labor. This was in 1750. German literature did not yet exist at that time. Kant had not yet written, Schleiermacher not yet preached, Niebuhr not yet lectured, Goethe and Schiller not yet sung. Frederick the Second, who was a great hand at strategies, was an ass in literature. He made a fool of himself by coquetting with Voltaire, but, what was still worse, he debauched the German mind by smothering the good native thought of Germany, and by popularizing the most corrupt thought of France. There was, however, a fiendish diplomacy in old Fritz, and in all his literary manœuvres. "The more infidel, the more cynical my Prussians grow, the less will they have yearnings for treason, the more will they submit to tyranny; the better soldiers will they make." The old fellow reasoned wisely, and, as the sequel proves, successfully.

Fancy poor Lessing, with his absolute love of truth and originality of thought, face to face with the literati of Berlin, who used to meet every day at the bookstore of Nicolai, the publisher and author. They were a regular mutual admiration society, mimicking the French and the English, abhorring all originality of thought, dull and phlegmatic, enthusiastic alone in their faculty of puffing, and praising, and admiring each other. Criticism did not exist; when a book or a pamphlet came out, copious extracts were given, and all was praised, as a matter of course. But it was all done in a Pickwickian sense, and the critic accused of a lack of sagacity, knew how to hide himself under the cloak of philanthropy.

But to put a stop to our generalizations and assertions, let us rather endeavor to support them by some evidence. Listen to Heine's view of Lessing, and let us keep in mind that Heine's skeptical, cynical nature was not over-addicted to compliments.

"Since Luther, Germany has produced no greater and better man than Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. These two are our pride and delight. Like Luther, Lessing acted not only by means of certain specific performances, but by stirring the German nature to its depths, and producing

a wholesome mental commotion with his criticism and his polemics. He was the living criticism of his time, and his whole life was polemics. That criticism made itself felt in the widest domain of thought and feeling, in religion, in science, in art. That polemics overcame every adversary, and grew stronger with every victory. Lessing, according to his own confession, required such controversy for the development of his own mind. He resembled that fabulous Norman who inherited the talents, knowledge, and faculties of the men he slew in battle, and, in this way, at last, was endowed with all possible advantages and excellences. It may be supposed that such a battle-loving champion must occasion no small noise in Germany, quiet Germany, which, at that time, was more Sabbath-still than now-a-days. People were confounded at his literary boldness. . . . At Lessing's sword trembled all. No head was secure from him. . . . Whom his sword could not reach, he slew with the arrows of his wit. . . . Lessing's wit is not like that *enjouement*, that *gaîté*, those springing sallies which are known in France. His wit was not the little French greyhound, that runs after its own shadow; it was more like a great German cat, that plays with the mouse before devouring it. . . . That a man like Lessing could never be happy, is very natural. Even if he had not loved the truth, and if he had not everywhere fought for it, of his own free will, he must, nevertheless, have been unhappy, for he was a genius. They will pardon thee everything, said lately a sighing poet, they will pardon thy riches, they will pardon thy high birth, they will pardon thy handsome figure, they will even pardon thy talent, but to genius men are inexorable. Therefore is the history of great men always a martyr-legend. If they suffered not for great humanity, they suffered for their own greatness, for their great manner of being, for their unphilistine ways, their dissatisfaction with ostentatious commonplace, with the smirking meanness of their environment—a dissatisfaction which naturally drives them into extravagances, e.g. into the play-house, or even into the gambling-house, as happened to poor Lessing."

Probably, one of the principal reasons which prevented the fame of the eminent man who elicited the praise from the fastidious Heine, from travelling abroad, is to be found in the singular isolation of his position, and in the anomalous despotism of the government under which he lived. The Englishman connects Shakespeare with the glorious reign of Elizabeth, Milton with the Revolution, with the Republic, and with Cromwell. Swift and Addison bring to his mind political struggles and developments of vast moment. The French cannot disconnect the remembrance of Clement Marot with that of the brilliant King Francis the First; Molière and Racine conjure up the mighty image of Louis the Fourteenth; Voltaire and Rousseau are the preparers and revealers of the Revolution. The Italian, trembling with delight at the utterance of the name of Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, blushes at the inglorious present, and, with aching heart, wanders back to the glorious past, to the times of municipal independence, of brilliant sovereigns,—sovereigns who loved poesy and art, and patronised the poet and the artist. The name of Calderon reminds the Spaniard of the ancient fame and greatness of the Peninsula, and the author of Don Quixote connects his thoughts with Don Juan, the triumphant hero of Lepanto. But the heroes of German art and German literature are robbed of such dazzling historical and romantic associations. They stand

isolated in their literary glory, and their fame is built upon their intrinsic merit, and not upon any adventitious patronage or environment of counts and princes. If it had not been for Goethe, who would ever have thought it worth while to have noticed the existence of the Duke of Weimar, or of his Duchy? In all these instances, where courts are mentioned in connection with poets in Germany, it will be invariably found, that the court owes its existence to the poet, rather than the poet his existence to the court. There is much in all this, which results from the pristine independence of the German mind, and which is honorable; there is also much in it that shows a lamentable separation between theory and practice. A lofty independence of mind about all abstract truth; an abject subserviency of mind in reference to all practical application of abstract truth in religious and political life. There are advantages connected with it for the literary man, whose attention is not diverted by the pressure of the world, and who, in Germany, is left to seclude himself, *con amore*, in his own universe of ideas; but there are disadvantages connected with it, bearing upon the practical influence of the writer at home and upon his prestige abroad. The splendor of the Weimar court, contributed, no doubt, much to make the travelling French and English nobility familiar with the names of Goethe and Schiller; but Lessing has no such advantages. His name and fame are little known abroad. Here and there we find a beauteous soul like Ruskin consult him for his views on the fine arts and poesy, or a ripe scholar and zealous theologian like Dr. Hedge pay his tribute of admiration to the German critic, or a high-souled divine like Mr. Martineau, do justice to Lessing's theology. Says Mr. Martineau, in his review of Professor Schwarr's book on Lessing:

"From long standing recollections, we cannot but feel a certain fascination hang around the name of Lessing. Our earliest impressions of German literature were from him. We well remember hearing the eccentric William Taylor, of Norwich read a scene or two from "Nathan the Wise," with the peculiar pomp of elocution and artifice of rhythm, which, though most akin to his paradoxes of thought, could assume dignity and sweetness, when penetrated by his humane feeling. Nor shall we ever forget the wonder and delight, the awful sense of intellectual *space* brought to us by the grand essay on the "Education of Humankind." No one, probably, could fall upon it in the eager season of inquiry and conviction, without being haunted for years by the shadow of great thought it flings around him, and returning again and again to its pregnant sentences, lest something of their terse significance should still be lost. And so little is this estimate of its *fullness* an illusion, that we doubt whether any one, recurring to it, after a considerable interval of self culture, ever failed to find what had escaped him before, and to interpret anew what he had seemed to read with open eye. Yet Lessing was no mystagogue, working up indeterminate thought into enigmatical oracles; but a man of sharply discriminating vision, and faculty of expression peculiarly clear and firm."

Says Dr. Hedge in his "Prose Writers of Germany":

"German literature is indebted to Lessing as scarcely to any other name in its annals. He has been to it what Luther was to the lan-

guage—the father of a new era and order of things. That era of the German intellect which has just transpired, that era which gave to Germany her present intellectual position among the nations, and which, through her influence, has become an era in the progress of the universal mind, dates from Lessing, its earliest representative in general literature; as Kant was its earliest representative in philosophy. He first delivered his countrymen from the tyranny of past forms, and placing before them the true models of all time, particularly Shakespeare and the Greeks, led them back to Nature, and through nature to new creations. Great as a poet, he was still greater as a critic. Germany has produced no greater critic than Lessing. But Lessing wrought even more powerfully, by his character and example, as the fearless advocate of truth, and the uncompromising enemy of all narrowness and false enlightenment, and pretence,—of all half culture and half truth,—than by his critical theories.

Says Herder:

"No modern writer has exercised a greater influence upon Germany, in matters of taste and of refined and profound judgment on literary subjects. Lessing's judgments have, for the most part, been confirmed by time. What then seemed sharp is now thought just; what was then hard, is now sober truth. I know scarce any one who could speak of himself, as a writer, with greater modesty and dignity than Lessing. And generally, he is, without question, in extent of reading, in critical acumen, and in many sided, manly understanding, the first critic of Germany. His dissertation on the Fable is the most concise and philosophic theory, concerning any species of composition, that has been written since the days of Aristotle."

But with the exception of a few choice minds, Lessing is almost a stranger to many of our American scholars and artists. Much of this indifference to the writings of Lessing, is perhaps, as we said before, to be attributed to the isolation of Lessing's position, and to the little prominence which is given to his life in the record of the history of his times. Let it not be supposed that Lessing was one of those men who was so much absorbed by his theories, that he had no sympathy with the events of his age. In his "Minna von Barnhelm" the seven years war, with its consequences, is alluded to; "Emelia Galotti" is full of the reformatory tendency of our times, and of its wrestlings with tyranny and red-tapism; in his "Dramaturgy," his longings for a national unity of Germany are eloquently expressed, as well as his mournings over the total absence of a national spirit; the seven years' war exercised also some personal influence upon him, as, for some time, he was secretary to one of the leading generals, and lived for years within the turmoil of the battle-field. But owing to his many-sidedness and savage independence of disposition, he led most of times a sort of gipsy life, and there is a fragmentary character about many of his essays, which shows that his mind was attracted by too many various interests to be long fascinated by any. For a long time he wandered about without home, living in taverns, reading on the way side, but this vagabondish sort of life, although it may have interfered with his greater usefulness in one or the other speciality of literature and the fine arts, gave him a keen relish for all, and a reality of feeling and vitality of thought, such as would make the mere closet-scholar, the

pale book-worm tremble only to think of. Frederic the Second and Joseph the Second took not the slightest notice of him, and this shameful neglect on the part of those whose chief duty it would seem to be to honor Genius, is perhaps most to blame for the comparative small place which Lessing holds in the attention of the world. Many Germans of those days undoubtedly respected Lessing and his genius, just as many of our countrymen respect and love our artists and men of genius. But posterity keeps no account of individual feelings and sympathies; history records only the acts of peoples as symbolized by the acts of their government. Individuals may say they do not care about politics. But history does, and wherever governments, whether republican or monarchical, democratic or aristocratic, treat with neglect, or with contempt, the claims of the fine arts and of literature, there will posterity fix a black spot and say, "*This was a barbarian government, a barbarian people.*" It would be ungenerous, therefore, to lay to the charge of poor Lessing, the blame which belongs to his age, and generation, and government. A government which would reward a successful soldier, a lying diplomatist, but has no word of sympathy, of encouragement for the struggling artist, for the men of soul and ideas.

We trust our readers will pardon the somewhat confused and irregular manner of our speaking of Lessing. We do not intend to write his biography, nor to enter here into learned disquisition about his writings. But recognizing in him one of the master-minds of the world, who had an undying love for the beautiful and divine in literature and the arts, we simply wish to say sufficiently about him to induce our friends to become acquainted with his writings; but we studiously abstain from speaking exhaustingly about him, as, in such a case, many might be disposed to confound the superficial notions derived from an incomplete essay like this, naturally confined by space and time, with that knowledge which they can very honestly obtain by studying attentively Lessing's writings themselves. Let us not be accused of pedantry. But we confess that we have a thorough contempt for the prevailing superficiality in reading, and, in order to clear us at least from all responsibility, we wish to declare most emphatically, that we have not the ambitious object in view of imparting knowledge. We only wish to throw out a few hints, and although some of our friends may think it odd, that a paper like ours, wedded to the fine arts, should have so much,—and we are afraid occasionally so tediously to argue—on the subject of literature, we are too conscious of the intimate relations between all the higher branches of human genius, to forego discussions, which to our mind, seem almost like duties devolving upon us.

And this reminds us of what a friend told us about Ruskin. Where did he acquire his huge sweep of knowledge, his wonderful power of criticism? Simply, as he says, by doing what we recommend our friends to do. What we recommend our schools, our scholars, our artists, our fellow citizens who aspire to culture, what we recommend our ladies who aspire to intellectual life to do, to comprehend his wondrous in-

fluence on the spirit of the age. He went to the literature of Germany, Italy, Spain, Britain, Greece, and—as he approached the gates of every one of these lands he asked, Pray, which are your master-minds? These master-minds he took up, and seeing how great souls are affected by the Moorish sun of Spain, by the sensuous skies of Italy, by the vast forests and ideal groves of Germany, by the matter-of-fact eras of Britain, by the æsthetical firmament of Greece, he un-provincialized his intellect, cosmopolitanized his soul, until his whole being imbibed the spirit of Humboldt's Cosmos. No wonder that he could lay down the rules for local landscapes since the landscape of the Universe became rooted in his very heart! When you come to Germany, therefore, stop at Lessing's "Laocoön." The extract, which we offer here, contains a portion of Lessing's answer to Winkelmann's question why Laocoön does not "cry" in the representation of the artist, as well as in that of the poet.

## I.

"The universal and principal characteristic of the Greek master-pieces in painting and in sculpture, according to Winkelmann, is a noble simplicity and a quiet grandeur, as well in the attitude as in the expression. 'As the depth of the sea, he says, remains for ever quiet, however the surface may rage, so the expression, in the figures of the Greeks, discovers, in the midst of passion, a great and calm soul. . . . This soul paints itself in the face of the Laocoön, and not in the face alone, under the most vehement suffering. The pain apparent in all the muscles and sinews of the body, and which, without considering the face and other parts, we seem almost to feel ourselves, in the painful drawing in of the abdomen alone,—this pain, I say, manifests itself nevertheless with no degree of violence in the face, or in the whole attitude. He raises no such fearful cry as Virgil sings of his Laocoön; the opening of the mouth does not permit it; it is rather an anxious and oppressivesigh, as described by Sadolet. The pain of the body, and the greatness of the soul are expressed with equal force in the narrow structure of the figure, and, as it were, weighed the one against the other. Laocoön suffers, but he suffers like the Philoctetes of Sophocles; his misery touches our soul, but we wish, at the same time, to resemble this great man in his capacity of endurance.'

"The expression of so great a soul far transcends the imitation of mere natural beauty. The artist must have felt in himself the strength of mind which he has impressed upon his marble. Greece possessed artists and philosophers in the same person, and had more than one Metrodorus. Wisdom joined hands with art, and breathed into her figures a more than common soul, &c.' The observation on which this criticism is based, that the pain of Laocoön does not show itself in his countenance with that degree of vehemence, which might be expected from its intensity, is perfectly correct. Further, it is indisputable, that in this very circumstance, in which a half-critic might judge the artist to have fallen below nature, and not to have reached the true pathos of pain, his wisdom is most conspicuously manifest.

"But, in regard to the reason which Winkelmann assigns for this wisdom, and in regard to the universality of the rule which he deduces from this reason, I venture to be of a different opinion.

"I confess, the deprecating side-glance which he throws at Virgil, first caused me to doubt; and then the comparison with Philoctetes—'Laocoön suffers like the Philoctetes of Sophocles.' How does this character suffer? It is singular

that his suffering should have left such a different impression upon our minds. The complaints, the screams, the wild execrations with which his pain filled the camp, interrupting the sacrifice and all solemn acts, sounded not less terribly through the desert island. They were the cause of his being banished thither. What tones of impatience, of misery, of despair! The poet made the theatre resound with the imitation of them.

"A cry is the natural expression of bodily pain. Homer's wounded warriors fall, not seldom, with a cry to the ground. Venus, when injured, shrieks aloud, not that she may be characterized by this cry as the luxurious goddess of pleasure, but that nature may have her due. For even the iron Mars, when he feels the lance of Diomed, cries so horribly 'as if ten thousand mad warriors were shrieking at once,' that both armies are terrified. Notwithstanding Homer elevates his heroes so far above human nature in some things, they always remain true to it, when it comes to the feeling of pain or affront, and to the expression of that feeling by cries, or tears, or by railing. In their heart they are beings of a higher order; but, in their sensations they are veritable men.

"I know, we more refined Europeans of a wiser posterity, understand better how to govern our mouth and our eyes. Courtesy and grace forbid cries and tears. The active courage of the first rude age of the world has transformed itself, with us, into a suffering one. Yet even our ancestors were greater in the latter, than in the former kind. But our ancestors were barbarians. To suppress all pain, to look with unflinching eye on the stroke of death, to die laughing under the bite of adders, to mourn neither one's own son, nor the death of one's dearest friend,—these are traits of the old Northern heroism. Palnatoko gave his Jomsburghers command to fear nothing, nor so much as to name the word fear.

"Not so the Greek! He felt and he feared. He gave utterance to his pains and to his grief. He was not ashamed of any human weakness; but he allowed none to withhold him from the path of honor, or to hinder him in the fulfilment of his duty. What was savageness and callousness with the barbarians, was, with him, the result of principle. Heroism, with him, was like the hidden sparks in the flint, which sleep peacefully so long as they are not awakened by external force, and neither take from the stone its smoothness nor its coldness. With the barbarian, heroism was a bright, devouring flame, which raged without ceasing, destroying or blackening, at least, every other good quality in his nature. When Homer leads the Trojans to battle, with wild shouts, and the Greeks, on the other hand, in resolute silence,—the commentators remark well, that the poet intended hereby to describe the former as barbarians and the latter as civilized nations. I wonder they have not noticed a similar characteristic contrast in another passage. The hostile armies have concluded an armistice. They are occupied with the burning of their dead,—an employment which does not pass without hot tears on both sides; *δακρυα θερμα χερσιν*. But Priam forbid the Trojans to weep; *εἰς εἰα κλαίειν Πριάμους μενᾶς*. He forbids them to weep, says Madame Dacier, because he fears that they will make themselves too tender, and enter the conflict with less courage on the morrow. Good! but why must Priam alone fear this? Why does not Agamemnon also give the same command to his Greeks? The meaning of the poet lies deeper. He designs to teach us, that only the civilized Greek can weep and be brave at the same time; whereas the Trojans, in order to be so, must first extinguish every feeling of humanity. *Νεμεσώματ' ἔν μιν οὐδὲν κλαίειν*, he makes the intelligent son of the wise Nestor say, in another place.

"It is worthy of note, that among the few

tragedies that have come down to us from antiquity, there are two in which bodily pain constitutes not the least part of the misery with which the hero suffers. The Philoctetes and the dying Hercules. The latter also, like the former, is represented by Sophocles as wailing, moaning, weeping, and crying. Thanks to our decent neighbors, those masters of propriety, a howling Philoctetes, a crying Hercules, would now be most ridiculous and intolerable characters on the stage. True, one of their newest poets (Chateaubrun) has ventured upon Philoctetes. But did he dare to show them the true Philoctetes?

"Even a Laocöon is numbered among the lost pieces of Sophocles. Would that Fate had spared us this Laocöon! From the very slight notices of it, which the ancient grammarians have given, it is impossible to determine how the poet handled this subject. But of this I am sure that he did not represent Laocöon as more stoical than Philoctetes and Hercules. Everything stoical is untheatrical, and our compassion is always commensurate with the suffering expressed by the object that interests us. It is true, if we see that object bear his misery with a great soul, that greatness of soul will provoke our admiration. But admiration is a cold feeling, which precludes every warmer sentiment and every clear representation with its vacant stare. And now, I come to my inference. If it is true, that cries under the infliction of bodily pain,—more especially, according to the old Greek view of the subject,—are perfectly consistent with greatness of soul; then, the desire of representing such a soul cannot be the reason why the artist was nevertheless unwilling to imitate those cries in his marble. On the contrary, there must be some other reason why, in this particular, he departs from his rival, the poet, who expresses their cries with the most deliberate intention.

## II.

"Whether it be fable or history, that the first essay in the plastic arts was made by Love,—this much is certain, that she was never weary of guiding the hand of the great, old masters. For whereas, at the present day, painting is pursued in its whole extent, as that art which imitates bodies in general, upon surfaces, the wise Greeks confined it within such narrow limits. He restricted it to the imitation of those bodies which are beautiful. Their artists painted nothing but the beautiful. Even vulgar beauty, the beauty of inferior orders, was, with them, only an incidental theme,—their exercise, their recreation. Their works aimed to please by the perfection of the object itself. They were too great to demand of the spectator that he should content himself with the mere cold enjoyment arising from a successful likeness,—from the contemplation of their own skill. Nothing in their art was dearer to them, nothing seemed to them more noble, than the aim of Art.

"Who would wish to paint thee, since no one likes to look upon thee?" said the ancient epigrammatist Antiochus, of a very deformed person. Many a modern artist would say: 'Be thou as deformed as it is possible to be; I will paint thee notwithstanding. Though no one loves to look upon thee, yet shall men look with pleasure on my painting; not because it represents thee, but as a proof of my art, which knows how to copy such a scarecrow so accurately.'

"True, the propensity to glory in mere skill, undignified by the worth of its object, is too natural not to have produced, among the Greeks also, a Pausonius and a Pyreicus. They had such painters, but they rendered them strict justice. Pausonius, whose department was below the beauties of ordinary nature,—whose depraved taste loved best to represent the un-

ightly and defective in the human form—lived in the most contemptible poverty. And Pyreicus, who painted barber's-rooms, dirty workshops, asses and kitchen-herbs, with all the diligence of a Dutch artist,—as if things of that sort were so charming and so rare in nature,—acquired the name of Rhyparographer, or painter of filth; although the luxurious rich purchased his pictures for their weight in gold, as if to help their nothingness by this imaginary value.

"The magistrates, themselves, did not think it unworthy their attention to detain the artist forcibly within his proper sphere. The laws of the Thebans, which required the imitation of the beautiful, and forbade the imitation of the deformed, is well known. It was not a law against bunglers, as it is generally, and even by Junius himself, considered to be. It condemned the Greek *Ghezzi*,\*—the unworthy artifice of obtaining a resemblance by exaggerating the deformities of the originals; in a word—caricature.

"We laugh when we are told that even the arts were subject to civil laws with the ancients. But we are not always right when we laugh. Unquestionably, the laws must not arrogate to themselves any power over the sciences, for the object of the sciences is truth. Truth is necessary to the soul, and it is tyranny to place the slightest restriction on the gratification of this essential want. But the object of the arts, being pleasure,† it is not indispensable. Therefore it may well depend on the legislator, what kind of pleasure he may allow, and in what degree he will allow it.

"The plastic arts especially, besides the inevitable influence which they exert upon the character of a nation, are capable of an effect which demands the close inspection of the law. If beautiful men produced beautiful statues, these again reacted upon those: and the state was indebted to beautiful statues, among other causes, for its beautiful men. With us, the sensitiveness of maternal imagination appears to express itself only in monsters.

"From this point of view, I think I see a truth in certain ancient traditions which have been rejected, without qualification, as lies. The mother of Aristomenes, of Aristodamas, of Alexander the Great, of Scipio, of Augustus, of Galerius,—all dreamed during their pregnancy of having lain with serpents. The serpent was a symbol of godhead, and the beautiful statues and paintings of Bacchus, of Apollo, of Mercury, of Hercules, were seldom without a serpent. The honest women had fastened their eyes on the god during the day; and the confounding dream awakened the image of the beast. Thus I rescue the dream, and give value to the explanation which

\* Pier Leon Ghezzi was a celebrated Italian caricaturist.

† William Ross, who has given an excellent English version of Lessing's *Laocöon*, thus comments on this assertion:

"Is Lessing correct in saying that the objects of the Fine Arts is pleasure? I doubt it much. To some they may offer food for a craving appetite for pleasure alone—and on all, perhaps, their effect is produced through the medium of pleasurable emotions. But the ultimate object of Art, if I mistake not, is of a more elevating, a more ennobling character, than the mere enjoyment of pleasure. It would appear that Lessing has been betrayed into a sentiment so unworthy of his capacious mind by a too blind admiration of whatever has been sanctioned by the practice of the ancients. It arises, also, partly from the vagueness of the term beauty, which he here lays down as the primary law of the Arts, and which he limits to one single application. But who is he who can point to his standard and say,—'There is Beauty?' Beauty is not one—it is a hundred, and a thousand-fold. It is as varied as Nature herself. It is modified by all the different qualities and capabilities of Nature's creations. There is beauty in a smile—there is beauty in a tear. There is beauty in the spreading oak and lofty pine, and there is beauty in the humblest shrub that creeps beneath our footsteps. This is the broad view which I think we are entitled to take of the principle on which the power of the arts is grounded, and under this point of view we shall be able to justify our admiration of Rembrandt as well as Raphael, of Van Huisum, as well as Michael Angelo."

the pride of their sons, and the impudence of the flatterer has established. There must have been some reason why the adulterous fancy was always a serpent.

"But I wander out of my way. I only wished to establish this point, that with the ancients beauty was the highest law of the plastic arts. And, this point established, it follows necessarily, that everything else, to which the plastic art might likewise extend, must yield, altogether, when it was found incompatible with beauty; and where it was compatible with beauty, must, at least, be subordinated to that.

"I will go no farther than the expression. There are passions and degrees of passion which manifest themselves in the countenance, by the ugliest distortion, and throw the whole body into such violent attitudes, that all the beautiful lines which define it in a state of rest, are lost. Accordingly, the ancient artists either abstain altogether from the representation of these passions, or they reduce them to a lower degree,—one in which they are susceptible of some measure of beauty.

"Rage and despair disfigures none of their works. I venture to affirm that they have never represented a Fury. (Except on coins, whose figures belong not to Art, but to the language of symbol.) They reduce anger to earnestness. With the poet, it was the angry Jupiter who hurled the angry lightning; with the artist, it was only the earnest.

"Lamentation was softened into concern. And when this could not be done,—when lamentation would have been as belittling as it was disfiguring,—what did Timanthes in that case? His picture of the sacrifice of Iphigenia,—wherein he apportions to each of the spectators the degree of sorrow proper to each, but covers the face of the father, which should have exhibited the most intense of all,—is well known, and many handsome things have been said concerning it. One says: 'The painter had so exhausted himself in sad countenances, that he despaired of his ability to give the father a sadder one.' 'He confesses by this,' says another, 'that the grief of a father in such a case is beyond all expression.' For my part, I see here neither the incompetence of the artist, nor the incompetence of the Art. With the increase of the passion, the traits of the countenance corresponding to that passion are proportionally marked. The highest degree of it has the most decided expression; and nothing in art is easier than to represent what is decided. But Timanthes knew the limits, which the Graces have assigned to his art. He knew that the degree of lamentation which became Agamemnon, as father, manifests itself in distortions, which are always ugly. He carried the expression of grief only so far as beauty and dignity could be combined with it. What was ugly, he would have fain passed over, or would fain have softened; but since his composition did not allow of both, what else remained but to conceal it? What he might not paint, he left to be conjectured. This concealment is a sacrifice which the artist made to Beauty. It is an example showing, not how expression may be carried beyond the bounds of Art, but how it must be made subject to the first law of Art—the law of Beauty.

"Now, applying this to the *Laocöon*, we see clearly the reason which I am seeking. The master labored for the highest beauty possible, under the given condition of bodily pain. Bodily pain in all its deforming vehemence, was incompatible with that beauty. It was necessary, therefore, that he should reduce it,—that he should soften cries into sighs. Not because crying betrays an ignoble soul, but because it disfigures the countenance, in a manner which is disgusting. Do but tear open the mouth of the *Laocöon*, in imagination, and judge! Let him scream, and see! Before, it was a creation which inspired compassion, because it unites



pain with beauty. Now, it has become an unsightly, an abominable creation, from which we are fain to turn away our faces, because the sight of pain awakens displeasure; and that displeasure is not converted into the sweet sentiment of pity by the beauty of the suffering object.

"The mere wide opening of the mouth, setting aside the violent and disgusting derangement and distortion of the other parts of the countenance, produced by it,—causes, in painting, a spot, and in sculpture, a cavity, which produces the most disagreeable effect in the world. Montfaucon discovered little taste when he declared an old bearded head, with wide, gaping mouth, to be a Jupiter delivering an oracle. Must a god scream when he discloses the future? Would an agreeable outline of the mouth render his speech suspicious? Neither do I believe Valerius when he says that Ajax, in the above-mentioned picture of Timanthes, is represented as screaming. (He enumerates the degrees of grief expressed by Timanthes as follows:—*Calchantem, tristem; moestum, Ulysem; clamantem, Ajacem; lamentantem, Menelaum.*) Far inferior masters, and that, too, in times when Art had already degenerated,—do not let even the wildest barbarians, when suffering the terrors of death beneath the sword of the conqueror, open the mouth so wide as to scream.

"It is certain that this reduction of extreme bodily pain to a lesser degree of feeling was observable in various ancient works of Art. The suffering Hercules in the poisoned garment, by an unknown master, was not the Sophoclean Hercules, who shrieked so dreadfully, that the Locrian rocks and the Eubœan capes resounded with his cries. He was more gloomy than wild. The Philoctetes of Pythagoras Leontinus, seemed to communicate his sufferings to the beholder, an effect, which the slightest touch of the horrible would have prevented.

## III.

"But, as has been hinted, Art, in modern times, has had its limits greatly enlarged. It is contended, that the sphere of its imitation embraces the whole extent of visible nature, of which the beautiful is only a small part. Truth and expression are said to be its first law; and as Nature herself always sacrifices beauty to higher ends, so the artist also is required to subordinate the beautiful to his general calling, and to preserve it no further than truth and expression permit. Enough, that by truth and expression, deformities of Nature are changed into beauties of Art.

"Suppose we leave uncontested, for the present, the worth or unworthiness of these views, may there not be other considerations, independent of these, which should induce the artist to set bounds to expression; and not take it from the extreme point of the action represented?

"I think, that the single moment of time, to which the material limits of Art confine all its imitations, will lead to such consideration.

"Since the artist can use but one moment of ever-changing nature, and the painter, more especially, can use that moment only from a single point of view; and since their works are made, not to be seen merely, but to be contemplated, and to be contemplated repeatedly and long, it is evident that, in the selection of that single moment and that single point of view, too much care cannot be had to choose the most fruitful. But only that is fruitful which gives the imagination free play. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine; and the more we imagine, the more we must think we see.

"Now, in the whole course of a passion, there is no one moment which possesses this advantage in so slight a degree, as the climax of the passions. There is nothing beyond it;

and to exhibit to the eye the uttermost, is to bind the wings of imagination, and to compel her, since she is unable to exceed the sensible impression, to occupy herself with feebler images, below that impression, stunning, as limitation, the visible fullness expressed. When, therefore, Laocoön sighs, Imagination can hear him cry; but when he cries, she can neither rise one step above that representation, nor sink one step below it, without beholding him in a more tolerable, and, consequently, less interesting condition. She hears him merely groan, or she sees him already dead.

"Further, since this single moment receives from Art an unchangeable duration, it should express nothing than can be conceived only as transient. All phenomena, to whose essence, according to our notion, it belongs, to break forth suddenly, and suddenly to vanish,—to be what they are for one moment only,—all such phenomena, whether pleasing or terrible, acquire, through the prolongation given to them in works of Art, so unnatural a character, that the impression is weakened each time we look upon it; until, at last, the whole subject produces only shuddering or disgust. La Mettrie, who caused himself to be painted and engraved as a second Democritus, laughs but the first time he is seen. If we look at him often, the philosopher becomes a buffoon, and the laugh changes to a grin. So of cries. The violent pain, which extorts the cry is either soon relieved, or else it destroys the sufferer. Although, therefore, a man of the greatest patience and fortitude may cry, he does not cry unceasingly. And it is only this appearance of perpetuity in the material imitation of Art, that makes his crying seem like feminine impotence, or like childish petulance.

"This, at least, the author of the Laocoön was bound to avoid, even though the act of crying were not incompatible with beauty, or though his art would allow him to express suffering without beauty."

But we cannot give any more space to extracts from "Laocoön." We trust we have given sufficient of it, to justify all our previous assertions in reference to Lessing's fascinating critical faculty.

De Quincey, in his Essay on Philosophical Writers, with the purpose of presenting the English reader with a series of specimens of the German Classical Writers, says that he has to begin with Lessing, "as the restorer and modern father of the German literature." He compares Lessing with Dr. Johnson; but in respect to the Arts he finds a more accurate parallel between him and Lord Shaftesbury:

"Each had the same sensibility to the excellences of Art, and applied it especially to the antique; inasmuch, that he who reads Lord Shaftesbury's 'Judgment of Hercules,' might suppose himself to be reading the Laocoön of Lessing; and not there only, but scattered over the works of Lord Shaftesbury, are many just views, or undeveloped glimpses of truth, on the principles of Art. The Laocoön is, perhaps, the most characteristic of Lessing's mind, and it has this advantage for the general reader, that, whilst the subject is one of popular interest, no great demand is made upon him for continuous attention,—every section, though connected with the rest, being tolerably complete in itself, and separately intelligible."

We will now pass on to Lessing's influence on the Drama. He found the German stage in a wretched state of chaos,—here a piece from the French, there one from Goldoni, or from the Danish of Holberg, with a few German imitations of a feeble nature, constituted the whole repertory, till Less-

ing appeared and redeemed the stage from its long continued mediocrity. In his earlier dramatic labors he, too, sowed his mental wild oats. Even his "Miss Sara Sampson" is too much in the lacrymose and creeping style. His connection with a company of actors in Hamburg, and a periodical paper dedicated to criticism, which he conducted, gave him an opportunity of entering more closely into the consideration of the theatre. His labors were attended with such success, that, shortly after the publication of his "Dramaturgy," the translation of French tragedies and German tragedies modelled after them, *disappeared from the stage*. He was the first who spoke with enthusiasm of Shakspeare, and paved the way for his appearance.

He soon produced his "Minna von Barnhelm," a true comedy, of the more refined description; but his greatest glory is his "Emilia Galotti." In this tragedy Lessing has disguised an old and celebrated deed of Roman virtue, the murder of Virginia by her father, under fictitious names, in modern European relations, and in the manner of present times. Virginia is converted into a Countess Galotti; Virginius into a Count Odoardo; an Italian Prince takes the place of Appius Claudius; and a chamberlain that of the unblushing minister of his lusts, &c. This "Emilia Galotti" is the greatest tragedy on the German stage, and we have no doubt, would be very acceptable to an American audience.

Lessing's sympathy with artists manifests itself at the opening of the tragedy, when Conti the painter calls on the Prince, with the portrait of the countess:

PRINCE. Good morning, Conti. How fares it with you? How thrives Art?

CONTI. Prince, Art is starving.

PRINCE. No, no, it shall not starve; not in our country. But the artist should not scorn to work.

CONTI. Work! Why, that is his very joy. But there is something in being compelled to work too hard, and this may rob him of his reputation as an artist.

The tragedy is full of noble sentiments and graceful thoughts. The interest is sustained throughout; Emilia, the heroine, combines with the spiritual beauty of Shakspeare's Desdemona and the naïve grace of Goethe's Clärchen, a lofty Corinne-like intellectuality; and when the loss of her honor has become irretrievable, she addresses her father in the following strain:—

EMILIA. In olden times, there lived a father, who, in order to save his daughter from disgrace, took the first dagger at hand to bury it in her heart,—and thus he breathed her into life a second time. But deeds like these, they all belong to the Past! There are no longer fathers like this father.

HER FATHER. There are still such, my daughter,—there are still such fathers. (*Stabbing her.*) God, what have I done?

EMILIA. Destroyed a flower before the storm discolored it. Let me kiss this fatherly hand.

Another masterly character is Marinelli, the chamberlain of the Prince, the unblushing minister of his master's lusts. In the wide range of the drama, we see no character to correspond with this. The intel-

lect of Macchiavelli in the soul of a lackey, the friendship of Iago in the mind of an office-holder. This gives you an idea of Marinelli, provided you can fancy him dressed up in the suit of a courtier, with an assumption of a good-natured stupidity, to discard the suspicion of his total depravity. When the Countess Orsina, who is over head and ears in love with the Prince, gives a rendezvous to her lover; she is received by Marinelli, who tells her that the Prince has not received her letter. The Countess, knowing that the Prince is present, scoffs at the idea of his having not received her letter, and yet keeping the appointment. Carried away by a paroxysm of disappointed love, she gives vent to all sorts and manners of poetical effusions, and in reference to the Prince pretending not to have received her letter, while, in fact, he complied with its request, she exclaims:

COUNTRESS. Upon my word, this is what I call a strange coincidence. Very, very strange, and very laughable! And you don't laugh, Marinelli. (*Marinelli, standing all the while, coldly by, imperturbable and phlegmatic.*) And you don't laugh, Marinelli? (*Solemnly.*) I command you to laugh.

MARINELLI. By and by, gracious countess, by and by.

But, although Emilia Galotti is his most thrilling and poetical, his "Nathan the Wise" is considered to be his most artistic production. A remarkable tale of Boccaccio is wrought up with a number of inventions, which are wonderful; but yet not improbable, when we consider the circumstances of the times; the fictitious persons are grouped round a celebrated historical character, the great Saladin, who is drawn with historical truth; the crusades in the background, the scene at Jerusalem, the meeting of persons of various nations and religions on the Oriental soil,—all this gives to the work a romantic air, with which the thoughts foreign to the age in question, which Lessing interposed for the sake of his philosophical views, form a singularly attractive contrast. Many of the sayings of "Nathan the Wise" have passed into proverbs in Germany, which is the best proof of the popularity of the sentiments, although the drama is too philosophical to win the applause of the galleries. The drama gains additional interest from the fact, that the noble character of Lessing's friend, Moses Mendelssohn, was before his soul, when he drew up the character of his Nathan.

Nathan is a wise and gentle advocate of Universal Tolerance and Humanity; and when the Sultan asks him which religion seems to him the true religion, Nathan does not give a direct answer, but relates Boccaccio's tale of the Mighty One in the East, who had in his possession a precious ring of inestimable value, which had been bequeathed to him by a dearly beloved friend. The ring reflected hundreds and hundreds of the most enchanting colors, and had the secret power to endear to God and to men any one who wore it with implicit faith in this power. No wonder that the mighty one in the East doted on the ring, and was determined to keep it for ever and ever in his family. This determination he carried into effect in the following manner:—He bequeathed the ring to the son he loved

best; stipulating that his son should, in his turn, also bequeath it to the son he loved best; and in this wise the most beloved son should always, without reference to rank, only in virtue of the ring, become the Sovereign. In this wise the ring passed from son to son, at last into the hands of a father, who had three sons. When death drew near, this father became very much embarrassed about the ring. How bequeath it to one without causing pain to the other two? his love is equally great for all his three sons. What is to be done? He causes two rings to be made, in every respect equal to "the" ring, and the artist is so successful, that the father himself cannot any longer distinguish the true ring from the two counterfeits. He hands over a ring to each of his sons, and dies. He is no sooner dead, when every one of the sons comes with his ring, and pretends to the crown. This leads to investigation, to contention, to discord. But all in vain. The true ring could not be identified. The matter had to go to the courts. The Judge argued: "The true ring possessed the power to endear you to God and to your fellow-men. This must settle the point. Say whom do you love best?"

The three sons kept all silent.

Says the Judge, "Why, it seems that you do not love any one but your own selves. None of your rings can be genuine. Possibly the genuine ring has been lost. I cannot give a verdict; but I can give you my advice.

"My advice is this: Let every one of you fancy the ring to be the genuine one, and by manifesting practically your love for God and your fellow men, you act in harmony with the wondrous power inherent to the genuine ring."

The three rings represent Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism.

Lessing made a world-wide distinction between the religion of Christ and the Christian religion. This drew him in endless controversies with other theologians of his day; and, in order to escape from the necessity of again answering their endless letters and explanations, he took his argument to the stage. There he hoped he would be free from the bites of the ecclesiastical mosquitoes. But, alas, they kept buzzing and biting about him until he was dead; and, unlike lay-mosquitoes, they show even a singular affection for the dead, and whole swarms of them are still buzzing around his coffin. All owing to the fact, that he made a distinction between the Christianity of Christ and the Christianity of Christians, and that he thought God capable of greater generosity than man; capable of loving his children,—whether accident of birth made them Jews, Christians, or Turks.

This religion of Charity, Tolerance and Love, is beautifully expounded by Nathan. The genuine ring, which has been lost, represents, we presume, this religion of Charity, as practised by Christ. How singular the fate of the tale of these three rings! Boccaccio, in his most hallowed moments of religious ecstasy, has certainly never thought how much theological capital would be made out of his tale. Shakespeare, too, was fascinated by these three rings; but what a contrast between the age of Elizabeth and the age of Lessing! Shakespeare created a Jew full of the worst

features of his race; and Pope exultingly exclaims, on beholding Shylock—

—"The Jew  
Whom Shakespeare drew."

Lessing creates a Jew, full of the loftiest features of his race, and the humane spirit of our own times, also exultingly exclaims, on beholding Nathan—

—"The Jew  
Whom Lessing drew."

The same noble and Christ-like spirit of humanity, that pervades "Nathan" and Lessing's theological writings, pervades also his Essay on Freemasonry. The aspect of such a powerful secret association, with ramifications all over the world, clinging, through all ages, through all the conflicting theological, and political, and social interests of society, to the one unerring, divine platform of Justice and Humanity, could not fail to make a deep impression upon a soul like Lessing's; but we have no space left for quotations.

Lessing's glory, as a distinguished man of intellect recently remarked, is his celebrated tract on the Education of Mankind, wherein he originated some true theories on history. We regret only that we are unable to give it place here. Lessing's sublime theory of the education of mankind applies to Art as well as to Religion. If we had the History of Art, the History of Religion, the History of Politics, the History of Science, the History of Marriage, and all the other Histories of matters pertaining to Humanity, based upon that magnanimous, yet common sense, that spiritual, yet practical basis, laid out by Lessing, we would draw nearer the time, when from our present boyhood, we might approximate to a somewhat riper condition. A man like Lessing, who has enriched the world with thoughts like those contained in his tract on Education, and such as those we have extracted from his *Laocoön*, should be known to every thoughtful American gentleman, every thoughtful American lady, every thoughtful American artist.

Since Lessing wrote down these magnificent thoughts, a hundred years have elapsed. In his times, his thought was considered too much in advance of his contemporaries to find the proper appreciation. But shall the hundred years have passed in vain? Or shall our country be called in vain a country of progress? Shall the American of the 19th century not prove a little wiser than Europe of the 18th century? At all events, if we cannot yet grapple with the thought, let us familiarize ourselves with it.

In many sections of Europe, where there prevails still a huge pagan gulf between Art and Humanity, such a reflection must seem strangely out of place in an æsthetical point. But we flatter ourselves, that here, we are getting somewhat ahead of these old heathen landmarks. As in Greece, of olden times, our purpose is to combine the artist and the philosopher in one and the same person. Nor can Lessing be properly placed in the ranks of merely German writers. As Madame de Staël, whose womanly intuition made her say so many true words, remarks: "Lessing was German by birth, but his thought belongs to the Universe."